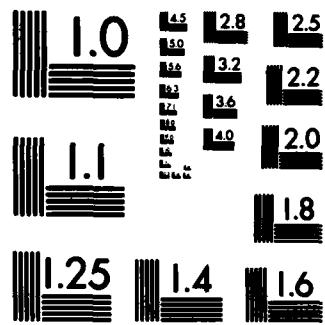


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EC INSTITUTIONS OF POLITICAL COOPERATION

Summary

Flexibility and pragmatism generally characterize political cooperation among the European Community members. In principle, the Community regards political cooperation as distinct from its functions as an economic entity. Political cooperation is not part of the Treaty of Rome--from which the EC derives its economic mandate--and, therefore, cannot legally be considered Community business. In practice, however, the participation of several EC bodies not formally involved in the political process has increasingly blurred the distinction the EC makes between treaty (economic) and nontreaty (political) issues.

The Foreign Ministers, because of responsibilities in both the economic and political spheres, intertwine their roles as foreign policy implementers and overseers of Community matters. In addition, the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) plays no formal role in political cooperation but has recently become associated with the process. Its involvement this spring in the EC's decision to impose sanctions on Argentina shows that COREPER can participate in political cooperation, at least when political/economic questions arise.

Attendance by an EC Commission member at political cooperation meetings has also eased the treaty/nontreaty distinction. Because this practice has only been in effect since late 1981, the extent of EC Commission participation in political discussions remains difficult to predict.

Most economic, social, and even EC organizational matters--which are meant to be discussed within the framework of the Treaty of Rome--involve, and cannot be separated from, political

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issues. The increased participation of EC economic bodies in the political cooperation machinery would seem to indicate that the 10 member nations (the Ten) are beginning to accept this fact.

Nonetheless, the legal separation between treaty and political cooperation issues cannot be ignored. Member states are not bound by EC political decisions as they are by economic policy. Some members--especially Denmark, Ireland, and France--adhere firmly to the distinction, accepting political cooperation only to the extent that it does not conflict with their basic national interests. As a result, the distinction between economic and political issues, as provided in the treaty, will continue to be promoted because of its convenience as a mechanism for protecting national interests and because support for formal political character for the Community is nonexistent, even negative, among some members.

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Political Institutions Evolve Slowly

The impetus for European political cooperation dates back to the early 1950s when, encouraged by the successful establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community, supranational voices in Europe proposed the organization of a European Political Community (EPC). It was not until the Hague summit of 1969, however, that the formal basis for political cooperation was established. At the summit, the heads of state and government called for a study of ways to accelerate the progress of European unification. In response, the Foreign Ministers issued the Luxembourg Report of 1970 in which they outlined the major objectives of political cooperation:

- mutual understanding of international problems,
- coordination of viewpoints, and
- joint action.

To achieve these goals, the Foreign Ministers increased the frequency of their meetings, established a political committee, provided for expert working groups, and recommended more active participation by the EC Commission in political cooperation. In 1973, the Copenhagen Communiqué called for increased consultation and cooperation among member states with a view to formulating common positions on issues of importance to the Community. Finally, the London Report of 1981 refined the process by making more specific distinctions between the roles and responsibilities of the various Community institutions involved in political cooperation.

These agreements established the basic framework for carrying out the day-to-day business of European cooperation on foreign policy. This framework comprises the Foreign Ministers, the Political Committee, Correspondants Européen, working groups, and the Committee of Ambassadors (see table, p. 10). The participation of other EC bodies not formally involved in political cooperation and the acceptance of certain practical conventions have lent a considerable amount of ambiguity to the process. Although certain aspects of European political cooperation have been formally institutionalized, a significant degree of flexibility and unabated sensitivity toward national interests and prerogatives continues to exist. As a result, neatly defined rules concerning practices and procedures of cooperation are difficult to make.

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European Council

Although the European Council is not technically part of the EC political cooperation machinery, it has recently begun to play an informal role. The Council, composed of EC heads of state and government, was created in 1974 in response to a growing need to maintain unity during international crises, especially those involving the Middle East. The Council meets three times yearly, and the agenda is traditionally dominated by Community issues--that is, economic and social matters.

During these summits the heads of state and government meet both formally and informally, and the informal meetings usually provide opportunities for discussion of foreign policy. (In fact, the Foreign Ministers have increasingly reserved the most sensitive political questions, in which individual national interests are at issue, for the European Council.)

Even though decisions do not always result, these EC summits serve several important functions. Leaders are free to air grievances, exchange new ideas, receive and discuss reports, and, in certain cases, issue declarations. In 1980, for example, the Council discussed the specifics of their Venice Declaration on the Middle East. Even in the absence of dramatic decisionmaking, the European Council's meetings retain the symbolic value of an attempt on the part of EC leaders to maintain "the momentum" for political unity.

Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers^{1/} of the 10 EC member nations is the most powerful EC organ provided in the Rome treaty because it makes decisions and takes action on behalf of the Community on matters not related to political cooperation. Decisions taken by the European Council are usually approved later by the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers decides major Community policy to be implemented by the EC Commission. One representative from each member state, usually the Foreign Minister, attends its meetings. This may vary, however, depending on the subject under discussion; i.e., Agriculture Ministers deal with agriculture policy, Transport Ministers with transport policy, and so on. "Political cooperation" is the domain of the Foreign Ministers.

^{1/} The Council of Ministers is also referred to as the EC Council. This should not be confused with either the European Council, which is composed of the EC heads of state and government, or the Council of Europe, which is not a body of the EC.

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The Foreign Ministers' basic function is to coordinate their often conflicting views into a uniform policy. This is a difficult task because many of the Foreign Ministers regard political cooperation suspiciously, fearing that it will impinge on their national interests or sovereignty. Not infrequently, the Foreign Ministers agree on little more than the fact that they disagree. Despite the diversity of views, they continue to work within the framework of consultation and compromise. Although certain decisions are dramatic, e.g., the spring 1982 Argentine sanctions, most of their work is supervising the business of the Community and creating favorable conditions for future Community action.

The presidency of the EC Council rotates among the Ten. Each Foreign Minister presides as president for a six-month period beginning on January 1 or July 1 of a given year. Succession is determined by the alphabetical order of the member countries, as spelled in the country's native language. This six-month rotation of the presidency applies to all EC bodies except the Commission. During each presidency, two political cooperation meetings are held, usually in the presidency capital. Efforts are made to limit the agenda to major issues. Discussion concentrates on matters which require decisionmaking, whether it be a question of imposing sanctions on Poland, sending a group to observe elections in El Salvador, or issuing peace proposals for the Middle East.

The Foreign Ministers also gather in an informal manner known as the "Gymnich"-style meeting. They retreat to a remote hotel or chateau over a weekend to concentrate on both Community matters and political cooperation. Only the Foreign Ministers and the EC Commission president are allowed to participate. To enhance the informality of the gatherings, discussion does not adhere to any formal agenda, and no official record is kept. In practice, the Foreign Ministers usually indicate in advance their desire to discuss certain matters, and the Correspondant Européen of the presidency country, a member of the Foreign Ministry staff, assists the Chair by taking notes. In addition, the Ministers usually dictate notes to their aides after the session.

The Gymnich meetings have become an increasingly important part of the political cooperation process. Conceived as purely informal gatherings, they have become a forum for taking preliminary decisions which are later formalized by the Council of Ministers and/or the Political Committee.

Theoretically, the Foreign Ministers are to take up the issue of political cooperation at designated meetings. In their capacity as the Council of Ministers--the body which addresses treaty matters, i.e., economic and social issues--they sometimes "change

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hats" and turn to political cooperation. An occasion for consultation also arises when the Foreign Ministers gather for dinner during the summit meetings of the European Council.

These frequent shifts in focus from Community matters to questions of political cooperation give the process an informal aspect which is welcomed by many of the Foreign Ministers because of the flexibility it allows them in addressing political questions. Foreign Ministers Genscher of the Federal Republic of Germany and Colombo of Italy have proposed to enhance this informal approach by "amalgamating" the Foreign Ministers' roles in the Council of Ministers and in political cooperation.

Political Committee

The Political Committee acts as the coordinating body of EC political cooperation. It does not have the authority of the Council of Ministers, but its coordination responsibilities allow it to play a central role. The Political Committee is composed of the Political Directors from the Foreign Ministries of the Ten, the Deputy Secretary-General of the EC Commission, and one or more officials from the External Relations or the Development Committees, depending on the issues at hand.

The United Kingdom and FRG Foreign Ministries do not have central political departments with worldwide responsibilities. In the UK case, the Deputy Under Secretary for European Affairs serves as the British Political Director. The FRG Foreign Ministry, which has two political departments of equal standing, sends as its representative the director of the department which oversees Europe, North America, disarmament, and the UN.

As the central coordinator, the Political Committee has a great deal of latitude in carrying out its responsibilities. Its principal task is that of preparing the meetings of the Council of Ministers. Reports that reach the Council have already been discussed by the Political Committee to ensure that the Foreign Ministers are presented with all sides of the issue and may decide between clearly defined options. If agreement cannot be reached among the Foreign Ministers on a certain issue, or if they are unsatisfied with a working group report, the Ministers will request that the Committee resubmit the matter for further discussion.

The Political Directors also draft speeches and public declarations, set guidelines for the President of the Council before press conferences, and work out the substance of demarches. Especially where public statements are concerned, the Committee plays a major role in working out the finer points of language and nuance. Sometimes, the Directors take the initiative and develop decisions before the Foreign Ministers have even met. Even though

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final approval on items of major importance lies with the Ministers, such practices allow the Committee a substantial amount of input into political cooperation.

The Political Committee also oversees working groups and has the authority to direct them to report on areas which the Committee deems important. The Committee has increasingly taken a long-term approach to resolving problems and initiating studies on areas in which the opinions of the Ten diverge.

The Political Directors meet monthly (except in August) in the presidency capital and once a year in New York just before the UN General Assembly convenes. The Directors are also charged with briefing their counterparts in the Spanish and Portuguese Foreign Ministries as part of a Community effort to maintain close contact with candidate countries.

The Political Director serving as president of the Committee sets the agenda for meetings after consulting with the other Directors. Discussion is to a large extent dictated by the need to confront international crises or coordinate EC positions for imminent international meetings. It is also a function of the state of preparedness of the working groups, upon whose reports the agenda is largely based.

The Political Directors conduct working lunches and dinners. Attendance is restricted to allow the Directors to air new ideas and discuss particularly sensitive issues. Because matters of a Community nature are discussed at the lunches, the Commission representatives are invited. They do not attend the dinners, though, because the Directors tend to focus on political issues, such as the Middle East or Poland, which are not treaty matters and, therefore, do not directly concern the Commission.

Correspondants Européen

Many of the day-to-day responsibilities of the Political Director are discharged by the Correspondants Européen. Perhaps their most important function is that of maintaining contact among the 10 Foreign Ministries through Correspondance Européen (COREU), a telegraphic network established in 1974. The Correspondants Européen relay to their counterparts in the other Foreign Ministries messages concerning meeting times and agenda, draft reports, statements, and amendments. They serve as the normal communication link between both the Foreign Ministers and the Political Directors of the Ten.

In addition to operating COREU, the Correspondants Européen attend Political Committee meetings and are responsible for drafting the agreed minutes. They occasionally do the same for

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meetings of the Foreign Ministers. At the May 1982 Gymnich meeting, for example, the Correspondant Européen of the Belgian EC president served as his unofficial notetaker. The Correspondants Européen also assist the Political Directors by culling working group reports from those which do not require decisions or lengthy discussion by the Political Committee.

To enhance the continuity of political cooperation with each rotation of the presidency, the London Report provided for the establishment of a "troika" system whereby representatives from the past, present, and future presidencies would work together to ensure a smooth transition. This troika has been operational since late last year, and the Correspondants Européen of the past and future presidencies have provided members of their staffs to work at the presidency capital. These middle-grade officials are treated as members of the host Foreign Ministry. They act as technical advisers on wording and procedural matters for all communications through COREU, sit in on working group sessions, and accompany the Correspondants Européen to all formal Political Committee meetings.

Working Groups

The working groups form the base of the pyramid of EC political cooperation. Most reports and many of the public declarations originate in these groups. Although proposals for study usually emanate from the Political Committee or the Foreign Ministers, the working groups are encouraged to initiate projects, especially if they feel a potential crisis area should be brought to the attention of the Foreign Ministers. In preparing reports, the groups study regional issues of immediate concern as well as long-term problems.

The 11 permanently established groups work on affairs concerned with the Middle East, Mediterranean, UN, Africa, Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, CSCE, disarmament, Euro-Arab dialogue, and anti-terrorism. Two nonsubstantive groups deal with communications and protocol (diplomatic representation of the Ten abroad).

Depending on the international situation, the working groups meet approximately every two months. Recently, however, the Middle East group has held monthly meetings. The presidency schedules, organizes, and chairs the meetings. They are attended by middle-grade officials from the 10 Foreign Ministries and a representative of the EC Commission.

The working groups prepare reports and drafts of speeches and declarations. Certain aspects of their work bear directly on EC

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political cooperation. For example, the UN group initiates coordination of the annual address by the EC Council president to the UN General Assembly. Papers on EC strategy at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe are first agreed upon at the group level. When the European Council decided to issue a public declaration at its 1980 Venice summit, the Middle East group drew up a series of options for its consideration. Similarly, the Asia group crafted the EC stand on the political sections of the 1980 EC-Association of Southeast Asian Nations declarations.

Despite the working groups' low standing on the political cooperation ladder, the nature of their responsibilities allows them to play a subtle but significant role in the process. Because much of the work involved in studying international problems and formulating joint strategies begins in the working groups, they have a great deal of flexibility with regard to how an issue will be approached and interpreted. The need to develop policies that incorporate the views of all the member states promotes European thinking within the groups. Convergence of views in the working groups can filter up to higher levels of the machinery because the Political Committee, and sometimes even the Foreign Ministers, tend to refer back to the working groups before committing themselves to a given position. As a result, coordination of the groups becomes part of the foreign policy decisionmaking process.

Of course working groups do not always find a consensus. The need to protect national interests, which often divides the Foreign Ministers, also affects members of the working groups. For the sake of a common position, some reports are so watered down as to be virtually useless as a foundation for a European foreign policy.

COREPER

The Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) falls into the category of institutions established by the Treaty of Rome for carrying out Community functions. Its main task is to prepare meetings of the EC Council--the Foreign Ministers in their capacity as Community policy coordinators. A link was established recently between COREPER and the Political Committee when COREPER assisted the Directors in drafting statements and developing steps for joint action. This was especially evident during the Falklands dispute and in the EC decision to impose sanctions on Argentina.

COREPER's involvement in formulating an EC stand on the Falklands issue illustrates the informal nature of political cooperation. The Committee was scheduled to meet just as hostilities in the South Atlantic broke out. Since the machinery

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was in place for the meeting of this group, it seemed logical that COREPER should put its resources to work in helping the Foreign Ministers confront the crisis.

COREPER had good reason to become involved in this case because the issues at hand could not be seen in solely political terms. The main question centered around the imposition of sanctions which, as such, constituted an economic measure to be taken for political reasons. In this regard, COREPER properly participated in EC policymaking. Moreover, the relative swiftness with which the sanctions were imposed suggests that this procedure for addressing such matters of "mixed competence" (political/economic issues) might be relied upon again.

EC Commission

Attendance by an EC Commission member at political cooperation meetings of the Foreign Ministers, the Political Committee, and the working groups also helps blur the distinction between treaty and nontreaty matters. This practice is still quite new; it has been in effect during only one presidency thus far. To date, the Commission has been limited to playing a passive role. How substantial a contribution it will be permitted to make in the future remains to be seen. The Commission worked recently with the Political Committee in writing the statement announcing the lifting of EC sanctions against Argentina and was involved in deliberations on the present Lebanese situation. This reinforces the tendency of the Commission to play a role in political cooperation when questions of mixed competence are involved.

Committees of Ambassadors

Political cooperation extends, in the form of Committees of Ambassadors, to the Ten's embassies in countries outside the EC. Although the frequency of their meetings depends on the country and the presidency, the ambassadors usually get together once a month for consultations. The ambassador of the presidency arranges and presides over these meetings. Consultation between the nine Chiefs of Mission and the Political Director in each capital of the Ten is also encouraged.

The Committee of Ambassadors in New York is considered by some to be more important than those in national capitals and is often asked by the Political Committee to formulate unified EC positions on issues before the UN. As a result, they meet frequently to coordinate their views.

The London Report emphasized the importance of periodic meetings among EC ambassadors to facilitate exchange of information and coordination of views. The committees' role in political

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cooperation, though, is quite informal and is usually limited to consultation. Occasionally, committees in various parts of the world will submit reports or make joint démarches either in response to a request by the Political Committee or on their own initiative.

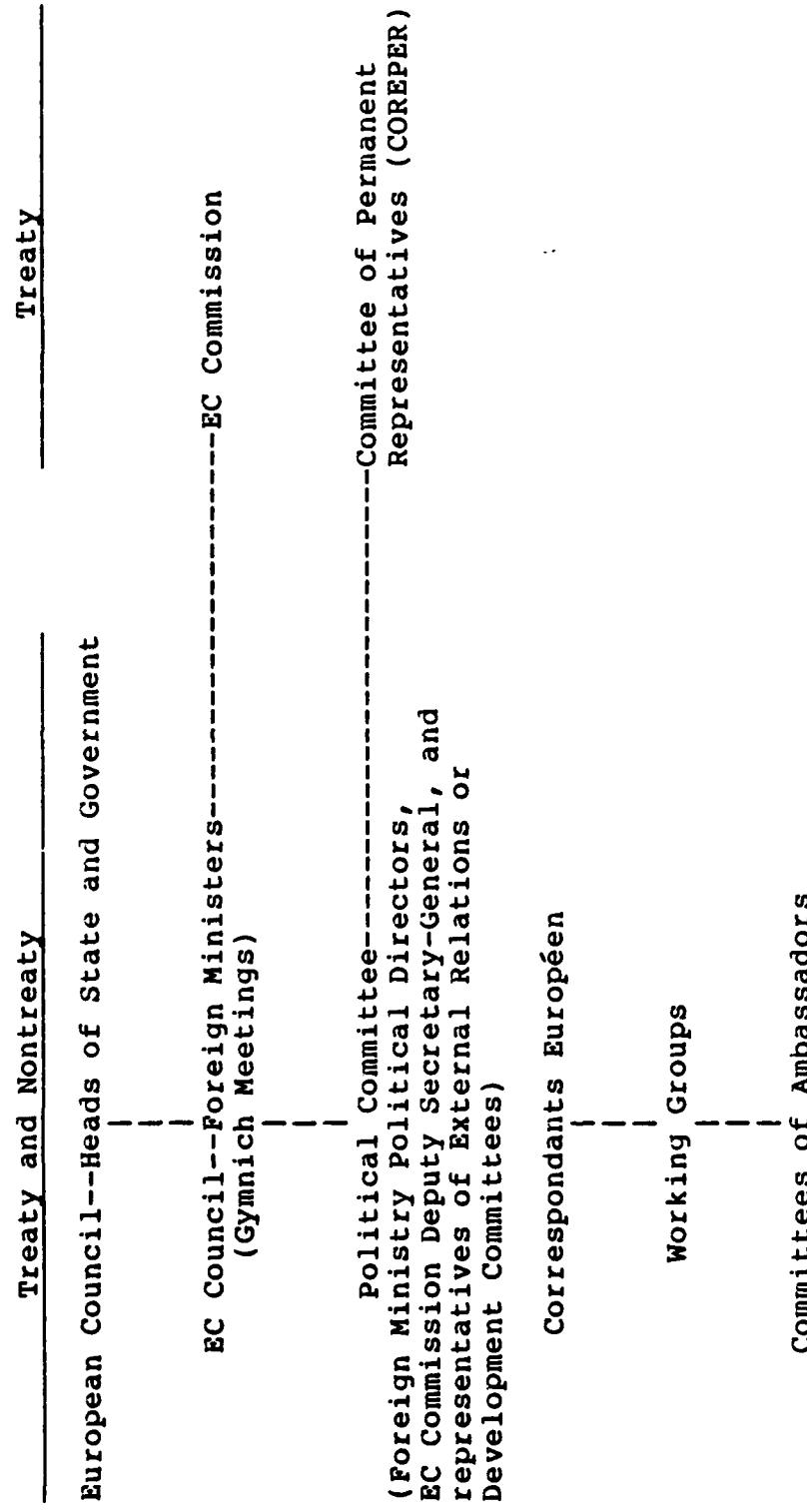
The committees also serve as sources of information on EC political cooperation activities. Often host governments will invite the committees to represent the EC or give briefings. Sometimes, the presidency is asked to speak or act on behalf of the Ten. If the presidency does not have an embassy in the capital making the request, the next member state in line for the presidency will act for the Ten. When a lack of resources necessitates, a troika system may be established whereby the ambassadors of the past, present, and future presidency countries pool efforts to maintain contact with the host government.

Prepared by Marion Herrington

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EC POLITICAL COOPERATION STRUCTURE



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